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Senate acts to protect Great Lakes

Lansing — The Michigan Senate passed legislation on Wednesday banning the possession and release of non-native fish in Michigan waters, Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) announced.

“Michigan must lead our neighboring states and provinces in protecting the Great Lakes,” Hardiman said. “This legislation helps save our water from infiltrating exotic species that kill off native fish and wildlife, just as we protect the lakes from chemical pollutants.”

Senate Bills 214, 215, 226 and 229, sponsored by Sen. Beverly S. Hammerstrom (R-Temperance), address the issue of genetically engineered and foreign fish species and their devastating effects to Michigan’s waterways.

In addition to damaging the natural fish ecosystems in this state, non-native fish carry exotic diseases and parasites that could disrupt and impair fish communities.

“By moving forward with this legislation, we are continuing our commitment to act as good stewards of the Great Lakes and encouraging other governments to join us,” Hammerstrom said.

- SB 214 and 215 prohibit the possession or release of a specific series of non-native fish species and provide for felony penalties in the Code of Criminal Procedure. Prohibited species include the bighead carp, bitterling, black carp, grass carp, ide, Japanese weatherfish, rudd, silver carp, snakeheads and tench. The bills also prohibit the release or possession of hybrid eggs of these species.

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- SB 226 prohibits the release of genetically engineered and non-native fish in Michigan waters and prohibits the importation of genetically-engineered variants of game fish not naturalized in Michigan without a special permit granted by the Department of Natural Resources.
- SB 227 sets forth various sentencing guidelines for violators, including a felony charge punishable by five years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine.
- SB 228 requires genetically engineered organisms to be quarantined in accordance with the Animal Industry Act, which authorizes the director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture to quarantine animals, equipment, vehicles, an area of the state, or the entire state to prevent the spread of disease. Genetically engineered variants of exotic species would be subject to the same testing procedures prior to importation.
- SB 229 distinguishes genetically engineered variants of species as an aquaculture species. Under current law, an aquaculturist harvesting an approved species from a registered facility is exempt from size, catch, possession limits and other restrictions listed in the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. SB 229 states that genetically engineered variants of these species would not be included and excludes them from aquaculture research permits.

The Senate Great Lakes Conservation Task Force held eight hearings throughout the state in 2001 to gather information from concerned residents in regard to water quality issues in the Great Lakes. In 2002, the bi-partisan task force issued its findings and recommendations in a report titled “The Citizens’ Agenda...An Action Plan to Protect the Great Lakes.” A copy of the report is available at senate.state.mi.us/gop/greatlakesreport.

The bills now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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